

THE CHIEF LEGATEE

A STORY OF LOVE & MYSTERY INVOLVING STARTLING INCIDENTS, COMPLICATIONS & ADVENTURES.

By ANNA KATHERINE GREEN.

THE LEAVENWORTH CASE, BEHIND CLOSED DOORS, ETC.



CHAPTER V.

In Corridor and in Room.

THREE quarters of an hour later Mr. Ransom and Gerridge stood in close conference before the last mentioned hotel. The former was peremptory in what he had to say.

"I haven't a particle of confidence in this newspaper story," he declared. "I haven't much confidence in her letter. It is this man who is working me. He has a hold on her and has given her this cock and bull story to tell. A sister! A twin sister come to light after fifteen years of supposed death. I find the circumstance entirely too romantic. Nor does an explanation of this nature fit the conditions. She was happy before she saw him in the church. She isn't her twin sister. I tell you the game is a deep one and she is the sufferer. Her letters betray more than a disturbed mind; they betray a disturbed brain. That man is the cause and I mean to bring his secret from him. You are sure of his being still in the house?"

"He was early this morning. He has lived a very quiet life these last few days, the life of one waiting. He has not even had visitors, after that one interview he held with your wife. I have kept careful watch on him. Though a suspected character, he has done nothing suspicious while I've had him under my eye. If you want to see him in his room, you shall."

"But this time the detective counted without his host. Mr. Porter was not in his room but in one of the halls. They encountered him as they left the elevator. He was standing reading a newspaper. The disfigured jaw could not be mistaken. They stopped where they were and looked at him."

He was intent, absorbed. As they watched, they saw his hands close convulsively on the sheet he was holding, while his lips muttered some words that made the detective look hard at his companion.

"Did you hear?" he cautiously inquired, as Mr. Ransom stood hesitating, not knowing whether to address the man or not.

"No; what did he say? Do you suppose he is reading that paragraph?"

"I haven't a doubt of it; and his words were, 'Here's a damned lie!—very much like your own, sir.'"

Mr. Ransom drew the detective a few steps down the corridor.

"He said that?"

"Yes, I heard him distinctly."

"Then my theory is all wrong. This man didn't provide her with this imaginary twin sister."

"Evidently not."

"And is as surprised as we are."

"And about as much put out. Look at him! Nothing yellow there! We shall have to go easy with him."

Mr. Ransom looked and felt a recoil of more than ordinary dislike for the man. The latter had put the paper in his pocket and was coming their way. His face, once possibly handsome, for his eyes and forehead were conspicuously fine, showed a distortion quite apart from that given by his physical disfigurement. He was not simply angry but in a mental and moral rage, and it made him more than hideous; it made him appalling. Yet he said nothing and moved along very quietly, making, to all appearance, for his room. Would he notice them as he went by? It did not seem likely. Instinctively they had stepped to one side, and Mr. Ransom's face was in the shadow. To both it had seemed better not to accost him while he was in this mood. They would see him later.

But this was not to be. Some instant made him turn, and Mr. Ransom, recognizing his opportunity, stepped forward and addressed him by the name under which he had introduced himself at the reception; that of his wife's family, Hazen.

The effect was startling. Instead of increasing his anger, as the detective had naturally expected, it appeared to have the contrary effect, for every vestige of passion immediately disappeared from his face, leaving only its natural disfigurement to plead against him. He approached them, and Ransom, at least, was conscious of a revulsion of feeling in his favor, there was such restraint and yet such undoubted power in his strange and peculiar personality.

"You know me?" said he, darting a keen and comprehensive look from one to the other.

"We should like a few words with you," ventured Gerridge. "This gentleman thinks you can give him very valuable information about a person he is greatly interested in."

"He is mistaken." The words came quick and decisive in a not unmelodious voice. "I am a stranger in New York; a stranger in this country. I have few, if any, acquaintances."

"You have one."

It was now Mr. Ransom's turn. "A man with no acquaintances does not attend weddings; certainly not wedding receptions. I have seen you at one, my own. Do you not recognize me, Mr. Hazen?"

A twitch of surprise, not even Ransom could call it alarm, drew his mouth still further towards his ear; but his manner hardly altered and it was in the same affable tone that he replied:

"You must pardon my short-sightedness. I did not recognize you, Mr. Ransom."

"Did not want to," muttered Gerridge, satisfied in his own mind that this man was only deterred by his marked and unmistakable physiognomy from denying the acquaintance just advanced.

"Your congratulations did not produce the desired effect," continued Mr. Ransom. "My happiness was short lived. Perhaps you knew its uncertain tenure when you wished me joy. I remember that your tone lacked sincerity."

It was a direct attack. Whether a wise one or not remained to be seen. Gerridge watched the unfolding drama with interest.

"I have reason to think," proceeded Mr. Ransom, "that the unhappy termination of that day's felicities were in a measure due to you. You seem to know my bride very well; much too well for her happiness or mine."

"We will argue that question in my room," was the unmoved reply. "The open hall is quite unsuited to a conversation of this nature. Now," said he, turning upon them when they were in the privacy of his small but not uncomfortable apartment, "you will be kind enough to repeat what you just said. I wish to thoroughly understand you."

"You have the right," returned Mr. Ransom, controlling himself under the detective's eye. "I said that your presence at this wedding seemed to disturb my wife, which fact, considering the after occurrences of the day, strikes me as important enough for discussion. Are you willing to discuss it affably and fairly?"

"May I ask who your companion is?" inquired the other, with a slight inclination towards Gerridge.

"A friend; one who is in my confidence."

"Then I will answer you without any further hesitation. My presence may have disturbed your wife, it very likely did, but I was not to blame for that. No man is to blame for the bad effects of an unfortunate accident."

"Oh, I don't mean that," Mr. Ransom hastened to protest. "The cause of her very evident agitation was not personal. It had a deeper root than that. It led, or so I believe, to her flight from a love she cherished, at a moment when our mutual life seemed about to begin."

The impassive, might almost suggest features of this man of violent passions but remarkable self-restraint failed to relax or give any token of the feelings with which he listened to this attack.

"Then the news given of your wife in the papers to-night is false," was his quiet retort. "It professes to give a distinct, if somewhat fantastic, reason for her flight. A reason totally different from the one you suggest."

"A reason you don't believe in?"

"Certainly not. It is too bizarre."

"I share your incredulity. That is why I seek the truth from you rather than from the columns of a newspaper. And you owe me this truth. You have broken up my life."

"If that's a strange accusation you make, Mr. Ransom."

"Possibly. But it's one which strikes hard on your conscience, for all that. This is evident enough even to a stranger like myself. I am convinced that if you had not come into her life she would have been at my side to-day. Now, who are you? She told me you were a relative."

"She told you the truth; I am. Her nearest relative. The story in the paper has a certain amount of truth in it. Her brother, not her sister, has come back from the grave. I am that brother. She was once devoted to me."

"You are—"

"Yes. Oh, there'll be no difficulty in my proving this relationship. I have evidence upon evidence of the fact right in this room with me; evidence much more convincing and far less disputable than this surprising twin can bring forward if her identity is questioned. Georgian had a twin sister, but she was buried years ago. I was never buried. I simply did not return from a well-known and dangerous voyage. The struggle I had for life—you cannot want the details now—has left its indelible impress in the scar which has turned me from a personable man into what some people might call a monstrosity. And it is this scar which has kept me so long from home and country. It has taken me four years to make up my mind to face again my family and friends. And now that I have, I find that it would have been better for us all if I had stayed away. Georgian saw me and her mind wavered. In no other way can I account for her wild behavior since that hour. That is all I have to say, sir. I think I am almost as much an object of pity as yourself."

And for a moment he appeared to be so, not only to Gerridge, but to



"I wanted money."

Mr. Ransom himself. Then something in the man—his unnatural coldness, the purpose which made itself felt through all his self-restraint—re-awakened Mr. Ransom's distrust and led him to say:

"Your complaint is natural. If you are Mrs. Ransom's brother, there should be sympathy between us and not antagonism. But I feel only antagonism. Why is this?"

A shrug, followed by an odd smile. "You should be able to account for that on very reasonable grounds," said he. "I do not expect much mercy from strangers. It is hard to make your good intentions felt through such a distorted medium as my expression has now become."

"Mrs. Ransom has been here," Ransom suddenly launched forth. "Within two hours of your encounter under Mr. Fulton's roof, she was talking with you in this hotel. I have proof positive of that, sir."

"I have no wish to deny the fact," was the steady answer. "She did come here and we had a talk; it was necessary; I wanted money."

The last phrase was uttered with such grim determination that the exclamation which had risen to Mr. Ransom's lips died in a conflict of feeling which forbade any rejoinder that savored of sarcasm. Hazen, however, must have noted his first look, for he added with an air of haughty apology:

"I repeat that we were once very fond of each other."

Ransom felt his perplexities growing with every moment he talked with this man. He remembered the money which both he and Gerridge had seen in her bag, an amount too large for her to have retained very much on her person, and following the instinct of the moment, he remarked:

"Mrs. Ransom is not the woman to hesitate when a person she loves makes an appeal for money. She handed you immediately a large sum, I have no doubt."

"She wrote me out a check," was the simple but cold answer.

Mr. Ransom felt the failure of his attempt and stole a glance at Gerridge.

The doubtful smile he received was not very encouraging. The same thought had evidently struck both. The money in the bag was a blind—she had carried her check-book with her and so could draw on her account for whatever she wished. But under what name? Her maiden one or his? Ransom determined to find out.

"I do not begrudge you the money," said he, "but Mrs. Ransom's signature had changed a few hours previous to her making out this check. Did she remember this?"

"She signed her married name, promising to notify the bank at once."

"And you cashed the check?"

"No, sir; I am not in such immediate need of money as that. I have it still, but I shall endeavor to cash it to-morrow. Some question may come up as to her sanity, and I do not choose to lose the only money she has ever been in a position to give me."

"Mr. Hazen, you harp on the irresponsible condition of her mind. Did you see any tokens of this in the interview you had together?"

"No; she seemed sane enough then; a little shocked and troubled, but quite sane."

"You knew that she had stolen away from me—that she had resorted to a most unworthy subterfuge in order to hold this conversation with you?"

"No; I had asked her to come, and on that very afternoon if possible, but I never knew what means she took for doing so; I didn't ask and she didn't say."

"But she talked of her marriage? She must have said something about an event which is usually considered the greatest in a woman's life."

"Yes, she spoke of it."

"And of me?"

"Yes, she spoke of you."

"And in what terms? I cannot refrain from asking you, Mr. Hazen, I am in such ignorance as to her real attitude towards me; her conduct is so mysterious; the reasons she gives for it is so puerile."

"She said nothing against you or her marriage. She mentioned both, but not in a manner that would add to your or my knowledge of her intentions. My sister disappointed me, sir. She was much less open than I wished. All that I could make out of her manner and conversation was the overpowering shock she felt at seeing me again and seeing me so changed. She didn't even tell me when and where we might meet again. When she left, she was as much lost to me as she was to you, and I am no less interested in finding her than you are yourself. I had no idea she did not mean to return to you when she went away from this hotel."

Mr. Ransom sprang upright in an agitation the other may have shared, out of which he gave no token.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that you cannot tell me where the woman you call your sister is now?"

"No more than you can give me the same necessary information in regard to your wife. I am waiting like yourself to hear from her—and waiting with as little hope."

"But this is not like my wife," protested Ransom, hesitating to accuse the other of falsehood, yet evidently doubting him from the bottom of his heart. "Why deceive us both? She was never a disingenuous woman."

"I have candidly answered all your questions, whether agreeable or otherwise," observed Hazen, "and the fact that I am as much shocked as yourself by these mad and totally incredible statements of hers, about a newly recovered sister should prove to you that she is not following any lead of mine in this dissemination of a barefaced falsehood."

There was truth in this which both Mr. Ransom and Gerridge felt obliged to own. Yet they were not satisfied, even after Mr. Hazen, almost against Mr. Ransom's will, had established his claims to the relationship he professed, by various well-attested documents he had at hand.

"The maze is at its thickest," Ransom remarked as he left a few minutes later with the perplexed Gerridge.

CHAPTER VI.

The Lawyer.

Hunt up her man of business," suggested Gerridge, "and see what he can do for you. She cannot get along without money; nor could that statement of hers have got into the papers without somebody's assistance. Since she did not get it from the fellow we have just left, she must have had it from

the only other person she would dare confide in."

Ransom answered by immediately halting a down-town car.

The interview which followed was certainly a remarkable one. At first Lawyer Harper would say nothing, declaring that his relations with Mrs. Ransom were of a purely business and confidential nature. But by degrees, moved by the persuasive influence of Mr. Ransom's candor and his indubitable right to consideration, he allowed himself to admit that he had seen Mrs. Ransom during the last three days and that he had every reason to believe that there was a twin sister in the case, and that all Mrs. Ransom's eccentric conduct was attributable to this fact and the overpowering sense of responsibility which it seemed to have brought to her—a result which would not appear strange to those who knew the sensitiveness of her nature and the delicate balance of her mind.

Mr. Ransom recalled the tenor of her strange letter on this subject, but was not convinced. He inquired of Mr. Harper if he had heard her say anything about the equally astounding fact of a returned brother, and when he found that this was mere jargon to Mr. Harper, he related what he knew of Hazen and left the lawyer to draw his own inferences.

(To Be Continued.)

The Deserter.

"Do you desire to have it understood?" asked the Judge, addressing the lady who wanted the divorce, "that your husband deserted you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Please tell the court as concisely as you can how he deserted you."

"Two months after we had completed our wedding trip he scolded me because he thought I was extravagant in the matter of getting clothes, and I went home to my people."

"Yes. Proceed."

"Well, I waited and waited and waited for him to come and beg me to return to him, and he never did."—Chicago Record-Herald.

Knew of One.

Traveler (delayed in Drearyhurst by washout)—"Are there any objects of curiosity in this village?"

Uncle Welby Gosh—"Well, I reckon I've got as much curiosity as any object you'll find. Where are you going mister, and what do you follow for a living?"—Chicago Tribune.

"But she talked of her marriage? She must have said something about an event which is usually considered the greatest in a woman's life."

"Yes, she spoke of it."

"And of me?"

"Yes, she spoke of you."

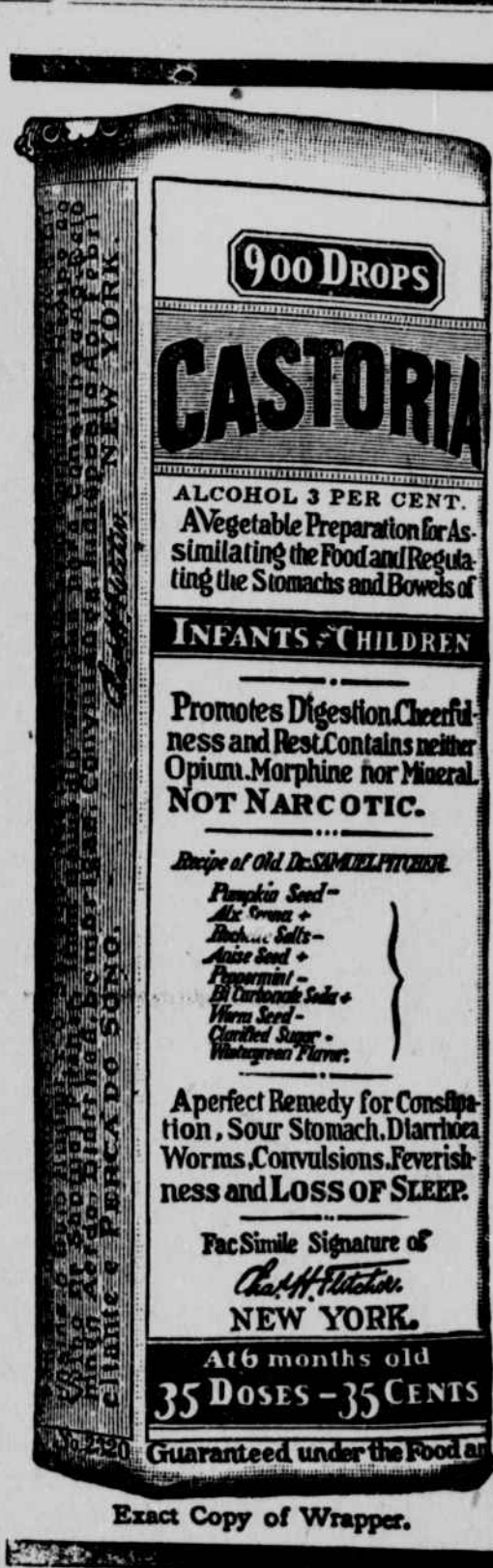
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NEW COTTON PICKER.

Asserted by Many That It Will Revolutionize Cotton Gathering.

Harry E. Fourcher's cotton picker has been given semi-public tests during the past two or three days. An exhibition was given yesterday to a number of gentlemen. There is the general conviction that the picker is a success.

The appliance, in its present form, works wonderfully well. It has won the attention of all Augustans. The general verdict is that Mr. Fourcher has won fame and his fortune.

The inventor is reticent. Yet he is absolutely confident. He is as sure that he has "hit it" as he is confident that night will follow day. But he would prefer to await an illustration by a perfectly manufactured machine before going to the public. His apparatus, at present, is of his own make, the model. In certain particulars it is cumbersome. In others crude.

But, however all that, it does the work. The test yesterday showed that. It took the cotton from the boll—thoroughly and cleanly—and dropped it in a sack, working with marvelous rapidity. Mr. Fourcher says it picks the cotton three or four times faster than it could be picked by hand. Others present said ten to twenty times faster. It appeared to newspaper men that it was gotten out fifty times faster.—Orangeburg Times and Democrat, July 15.

"You want a speedy car, of course?" "You bet." How about a hill climber?" "Oh I don't keer to go after pedestrians to that extent." Just gimme a machine that will get 'em on the flat."—Pittsburg Post.

"Maria, do you remember that fine dinner you got up all by yourself on the day I asked you to be mine?" "Yes, indeed, George!" "Everything was splendid." "I am sure it was."

"Ah, I wish your mother was living with us now, Maria!"—Puck.

"That's nothing," retorted the other. "I get a boat every morning and pull up the river."

When a woman expresses a wish her husband generally has to pay the expressage.

Twenty years after a girl wouldn't marry a man he feels like apologizing to his grandmother about it.

A joke is always a joke when it is on the other fellow.

Jackson's Bridge Builder.

"Stonewall Jackson," said a Virginia veteran, "used to tell a story about a bridge builder. This bridge builder was called Old Miles. He was very necessary to Jackson, because the flimsy bridges on the line of march were continually being swept away by the floods or destroyed by the enemy, and in these contingencies Miles was a regular jewel. He could run you up a bridge in the time it would take another man to make the measurements. One day the Union troops burned a bridge across the Shenandoah. Stonewall Jackson called Old Miles to him said: 'You must put all your men to work, Miles, and you must keep them at it all night, for I've got to have a bridge across this stream by morning. My engineer will draw up the plans for you.' Well, early the next morning Jackson, very much worried, met Old Miles. 'See here,' he said, dubiously, 'how about that bridge? Did the engineer give you the plan?' Old Miles took the cigar from his mouth and flicked the ash off with a sneer. 'General,' he said, 'the bridge is done. I dunno whether the piker is or not.'"—Kansas City Star.

A Strong Pull.

Two men were having an argument as to their respective strengths. "Why," said the first, "every morning before breakfast I get a bucket and pull up ninety gallons from the well."

"That's nothing," retorted the other. "I get a boat every morning and pull up the river."